

2975 Laurel Street #20  
San Diego, California 92104

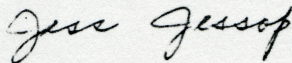
June 24, 1988

Edward Fike  
Post Office Box 191  
San Diego, California 92112

Dear Mr. Fike,

I submit the attached tribute to Leonard Matlovich for your consideration for inclusion in the Union's opinion page. I am a 20-year resident of San Diego, a gay liberationist, a gay historian, and Coordinator of the Lesbian and Gay Archives of San Diego.

Yours in the struggle,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jess Jessop".

Jess Jessop



## THE DEATH OF A HERO

In September of 1975 T/Sgt Leonard Matlovich was pictured on the cover of Time in his Air Force uniform with the caption, "I am a Homosexual". After being awarded a Bronze Star and a Purple Heart on one of his three tours of duty in Viet Nam, and after 12 years of impeccable service to his country, Matlovich put his military career on the line by announcing his homosexuality. He did so in order to challenge the U.S. military's long-standing exclusion of gay men and lesbians. And though he lost his legal battle to stay in the Air Force, Matlovich clearly demonstrated in a very public way that gay people could and do serve admirably in the armed forces. The military wall of homophobia had developed a major crack.

In civilian life, Lennie (as he was known to his friends) continued his struggle for gay/lesbian civil rights. Years later, even ill health and an AIDS diagnosis could not make him give up. Instead, he became an AIDS activist and dedicated the remainder of his days to AIDS education and pressuring government to make an appropriate response to the AIDS epidemic.

Though I did not know Lennie personally, I felt very close to him. We shared the common experiences of military service, time in Viet Nam, gay/lesbian liberation, and the struggle against AIDS. As recently as last month at the March on Sacramento for Lesbian and Gay Rights he delivered an emotional speech at the capitol. It was there that I was honored to meet Lennie, hold him in my arms for a moment and at last tell him that I loved him and understood the extent of his sacrifice. I told him what an inspiration he had been to me and hundreds of thousands of other gay Americans.

June 23rd, 1988 Lennie made his transition. For me the world is a colder



(2)

place. I feel a stunning sense of loss and a paralyzing sadness. At the same time I feel deeply inspired by a life that was the essence of courage and integrity. Lennie fought bravely whether it was in Viet Nam, in a court of law, in the struggle for human rights, or in the struggle to live with AIDS. Some may think that he lost all of these battles. I think that he taught us all how to live. He was a brave American whose life and passing deserve special notice.

Jess Jessop